

SENATE—Monday, May 1, 2000

The Senate met at 10:01 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore [Mr. THURMOND].

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, offered the following prayer:

Gracious Lord, our hearts are filled with an attitude of gratitude for the gifts of life: intellect, emotion, will, strength, fortitude, and courage. We are privileged to live in this free land You have so richly blessed.

You have created each of us to know, and love, and serve You. Thanksgiving is the memory of our hearts. You have shown us that gratitude is the parent of all other virtues. Without gratitude, our lives miss the greatness You intended, and we remain proud, self-centered, and limited. Thanksgiving is the thermostat of our souls opening us to the inflow of Your Spirit and the realization of even greater blessings.

We also thank You for the problems that make us more dependent on You for guidance and strength. When we have turned to You in the past, You have given us leadership skills that we needed. Thank You, Lord, for taking us where we are with all our human weaknesses, and using us for Your glory. May we always be distinguished by the immensity of our gratitude for the way that You pour out Your wisdom and vision when we humbly call out to You for help. We are profoundly grateful. You are our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable CRAIG THOMAS, a Senator from the State of Wyoming, led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, for the information of all Senators, following morning business, the Senate will begin consideration of S. 2, the Elementary and Secondary Education Reauthorization Act. It is expected that this legislation will consume most of the week. However, by previous consent, on Tuesday morning the Senate will begin debate on overriding the President's veto of the nuclear waste

bill. As a reminder, the vote on the veto override has been scheduled for 3:15 p.m. on Tuesday.

I thank my colleagues for their attention.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate begin a period of morning business until 1 p.m. today, with the time equally divided in the usual form, with Senators speaking for up to 5 minutes each, with the following exception: Senator THOMAS or his designee from 10:30 to 11 a.m.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THOMAS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

PHARMACY BENEFITS FOR MILITARY RETIREES

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Mr. WARNER, as well as my colleagues on the committee, Senator LEVIN, our ranking member, and especially Senator SNOWE, for their efforts in doing the right thing for our Medicare-eligible military retirees.

Today, there was introduced in the Senate, on behalf of Senator WARNER, legislation that will have an extremely positive impact on our military retirees and their ability to acquire prescription drugs. This is enormously important for our retirees and will be strongly supported in this body. Hopefully, it will be a part of the defense authorization bill that will come to the floor in the next few weeks.

This initiative gives all military retirees over 65 the same pharmacy benefit that one-third of them already have under the Base Realignment and Closure pharmacy program, a mail order and a retail pharmacy benefit. It makes sense, and is only fair that all military retirees over 65 have one consistent pharmacy benefit.

This pharmacy benefit is a significant and affordable first step in healing the growing rift with the military retiree community caused by the Govern-

ment's failure to deliver on the promise of health care for life. The pharmacy benefit is the number one issue and priority of military retirees, since pharmacy needs are the biggest drain on the pensions of military retirees. Expanding the BRAC pharmacy benefit to all Medicare-eligible military retirees is the right thing to do for service members who have dedicated their lives to protect and serve our country.

Approximately 450,000 of the 1.3 million Medicare-eligible military retirees already have access to a retail and mail order pharmacy benefit. This was the result of DOD base closures. When the Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommended the closure of several military bases, part of what was lost was access to pharmaceutical benefits for many retired military personnel who were receiving their prescription drugs benefits at those facilities. To address their needs, Congress created the BRAC pharmacy benefit which was a mail order, as well as a retail benefit, for needed prescriptions.

Unfortunately, that benefit only covered about a third of all of those who have retired, so we had a dual system where, by accident of where you had retired and by the results of the Base Closure Commission, some retirees received the benefit and others did not. This legislation would treat military retirees across the country the same.

Basically this bill makes prescription drugs accessible and available to military retirees over the age of 65, at a very reasonable cost—a 20 percent co-pay when they acquire the prescription drugs in retail pharmacy and an \$8 co-pay if they buy them through mail order. There is no deductible and no enrollment fee. This is recognition that there are incredibly important and significant health needs for our retirees. This pharmacy benefit is one that our military retirees richly deserve.

The BRAC pharmacy benefit was initiated by the Congress in the Fiscal Year 1994 Defense Authorization Act to ensure that Medicare-eligible retirees, who depended on the base's medical treatment facilities for their pharmacy needs, would be taken care of after the base was closed. This benefit includes the mail order pharmacy program for the co-payment of \$8 for up to a 90-day supply and use of the Tricare retail network pharmacies for a 20-percent co-pay for up to a 30-day supply.

We ask our armed forces to leave their families, risk their lives, fight our wars, help countries ravaged by disasters, and enforce peace all over the world. Americans who devote their lives to serving our country deserve